



## Kal Jazeera

November 15, 2024

Interviewed by Ashby Combahee and Dartricia Rollins

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**Dartricia Rollins 00:04**

All right, my name is Dartricia Rollins and I'm here with Ashby Combahee and we are interviewing Kal Jazeera for the We Tell Our Own Stories: Reproductive Justice oral histories event. Today is November 15, 2024, and Georgia Dusk: a southern liberation oral history project is conducting this oral history at Loudermilk Conference Center in downtown Atlanta as part of JusticeNOW2024 a cross-movement, power-building, and power-shifting national conference. You have been asked to participate in this oral history as part of the documentation of the long history of resistance, struggle, and organizing in Georgia and across the US South. SPARK RJ is one of the central organizations within this legacy of community networks, organizing strategies, and resources for healing in response to constant state repression. The oral history interviews provide elements of history that are often not apparent in traditional archival documents or dominant media. The interviews enable participants to reclaim the narrative and historical representation of reproductive justice organizing and movement building. So Kal, could you please introduce yourself by saying your name, pronouns, age, and organizing or cultural work you do?

**Kal Jazeera 01:21**

So my name is Khalid. I'm also known as Kal Jazeera. My pronouns are they/them, I am 32, I live in Chicago, and my work is in storytelling, social, emotional learning, Palestinian Liberation and queerness and how all of those movements tie in together.

**Dartricia Rollins 01:43**

I'm excited to learn how all those movements tie in together.

**Kal Jazeera** 01:45

Because they do.

**Dartricia Rollins** 01:47

Yes. Okay, so my first question to kind of ground us is, who would you like to dedicate your oral history to?

**Kal Jazeera** 01:55

I want to dedicate my oral history to queer Palestinians all over the world and queer folks in marginalized communities.

**Dartricia Rollins** 02:03

Thank you. And so could you tell us a little bit more about where you from and where you are currently living?

**Kal Jazeera** 02:12

So I was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, which is not a fact I love sharing, but I moved to Chicago when I was 19. So I've been in Chicago for a long time now, and that is where I'm doing a lot of my work. Just being.

**Dartricia Rollins** 02:31

What has it felt like coming into, I guess, like your adulthood in Chicago, and, yeah, the time that you spent there and maybe the the experiences you've had.

02:46

So as a queer person, I kind of left Columbus to get away from family and have space to kind of like find myself. I think I left, a lot of my relationship with my culture and religion and things like that, in search of acceptance in the gay community. And my early times in Chicago were actually really challenging, cause I found that I was in search of like, a seat at the table with the gays, and didn't find that seat. Because I found that I was still, you know, in the margins even then. And so I think for a while, there was a time where I felt like I had left behind my culture, and then had to, kind of, like, go backwards and, like, go looking for my community and looking for people. And that was difficult, because there wasn't really a clear set like queer SWANA community, queer Arab community. And what I found was that, like, that table was a table that a lot of us had to build ourselves, and that I was part of that building process. And so that was really exciting. I just know, for like, the first four or five years of living in Chicago, telling my friends, like, I don't have anyone else to speak Arabic with. I don't have anyone else that I like see myself in. And then even as I did start finding people, it was still just really difficult.

**Dartricia Rollins** 04:25

And so was that that kind of process like, going back and like re-refinding your culture and finding your people?

**Kal Jazeera** 04:38

Definitely challenging, I think, because we don't have a frame of reference or a context as to what like, what does it look like to have queer Palestinian community? What is it? What does it look like to have queer Muslim community? What does it look like to have queer Arab community, and we don't have that because of how deep the diaspora is. And how spread out we've been because of the ways that, like colonization has separated us from our culture, and because of that, like, that same colonizing force that makes us think there is no such thing as a queer Muslim, there is no such thing as a queer Palestinian, those same colonizing forces that tell us like, go be gay and Palestinian and see how they treat or go be gay in Palestine, see how they treat you. And you know, there's plenty of queer people that live in Palestine, there's trans people that live in Palestine, there's trans Palestinians that live all over the world. And I've actually been grateful for social media and being able to connect us. So yeah, and I've just tried to really put in the work in Chicago to be someone who, you know, like, every year I try hosting a Iftar at the end of Ramadan, to be like, you don't have a place, to have Iftar with your family. Like, you know, come to my house, come to our place. Like, let's have these meals together. Let's sustain our tradition and our culture. So, yeah.

**Dartricia Rollins** 06:02

So, what does your community look like now?

**Kal Jazeera** 06:04

\*cough\* That's a tough question, because just over the years, I think community has gotten harder to sustain. I think the pandemic affected us in a really big way. I think people in my community are working more jobs than they used to. I think people have less free time and less income to come to a dinner, to put an event together. But simultaneously, I also would uplift the fact that there's more Palestine movement and more queer movement in Chicago now than there was five years ago. There is more solidarity showing itself now. There's a lot more happening. So that's, you know, that's the exciting part of it, while also recognizing that, like everyone is struggling more than they were. Yeah.

**Dartricia Rollins** 07:01

Yeah, I'm curious to know more about your your background in storytelling and yeah, like, I don't know what, what has that looked like for you? Yeah.

**Kal Jazeera** 07:20

So, I'll always identify, first and foremost, as an artist and a creative I've been a musician my whole life. Violin is my first language in that \*affirmations\* I spent a lot of time studying Arabic music, and so I play Oud. I play accordion. A lot of my journey in finding my community was through music, like I played with the Middle East Music Ensemble of University of Chicago for four years, I believe. You know, when I talk about, like, kind of having this realization of, like, I had left my culture and community behind in search of a seat at the gay table. Once I didn't find that seat, I kind of had to, like, double back and do this work on my own, and be like, Okay, I'm not surrounded by my community anymore. I have to, like, study my own language. I taught myself to read and write Arabic, even though, like, I'd grown up speaking it, but no one taught me to read and write it. I went in study of the culture, of the music, things like that. So did music for a while, then I kind of like transitioned into comedy, and I'm a student of Second City IO, the annoyance, did improv for years, and also within that time, started doing more teachings, where I was like a art counselor and taught at camps, And I've since been a teaching artist

with Playmakers Laboratory in Chicago, which does creative writing and storytelling, \*coughs\* pardon me, and I currently work with the Brainchild, which is a organization that also has teaching artists. So I really like curating and producing events with shows and just like variety, giving people the space to speak and be heard, because I really value the importance of space and just uplifting voices that are like I got tired of not getting booked at shows. I got tired of not seeing people that looked like me at shows. So I said, You know what? I'll produce my own shows, and they will be entirely POC and they will be like voices from people we're not hearing enough. And I just think that like everyone has a story to hear from someone else. Everybody has a story that they need to tell, and then everybody has a story they need to live. And I'm big on that. So a lot of my focus is in play, social emotional learning and how that ties to liberation and giving people just the space to...play with each other and laugh and be creative. And we're in this space now where so many of us are struggling to survive, and so we don't really get the time and the space to do that.

**Dartricia Rollins** 10:14

And so part of this conference is about cross movement work, because I think a lot of us, some of us new, and some of us are coming to understand that our movements cannot be separate, that they have to be intertwined. And so I'm curious about what led you to come to this Spark Reproductive Justice NOW conference this weekend?

**Kal Jazeera** 10:44

So, I got connected to Spark through honestly, an old friend that I hadn't heard from in a long time. Their name's Saleem and I believe they were an intern or worked with Spark for a while. They're based here in Atlanta. We went to Columbia College Chicago together. What, 14/15, years ago, now reconnected through social media, and they're just like, hey, I think this would be a really good fit. Like, we'd love to hear from you, hear your voice. Is this something you'd be interested in? I was just like, absolutely. I think it's really exciting that a conference like this exists, and I'm excited to bring a queer Palestinian voice to the panel, to the stage, I am leading a workshop called What are your Thawabit's? And Thawabit's are the principles of Palestinian Liberation. And my goal with the workshop is, by the end, to have people write and define at least three principles themselves for liberation. I'm really inspired by the commitment and unwaveringness in the Palestine Liberation Movement to be like these are the principles, and we're not budging. We are not negotiating with normalizing an occupying force. We're not letting down from our right of return. We're not budging on these principles. And I think it's getting more and more important as the culture shifts in our country to have principles that you're not going to budge on, and to define them as we move forward, because I think those principles are going to they're being tested, and I think they're going to continue to be tested, and it's going to affect how we move through community and how we move through movement.

**Dartricia Rollins** 12:37

I'm curious if you know, if you coming to prepare for this workshop, are there three principles?

**Kal Jazeera** 12:47

I should have been ready for that. One, I set that up. I set that up for myself.

**Dartricia Rollins** 12:55

You actually did. I was like, forget. that other question.

**Kal Jazeera** 12:57

What if I told you? What if I told you? I have to doubt somewhere, they're just not with me. Because I don't want to make them up on the spot. Because, I want to be like, Oh, you got it on the mic. You can't budge.

**Dartricia Rollins** 13:10

It's okay. No, um, I, really, I, I really love that, that workshop idea and that, that idea of.

**Kal Jazeera** 13:19

Please attend.

**Dartricia Rollins** 13:20

If I can get out of here I will. Of like, No, these are, these are the principles that we're saying are our principles for liberation, and it's not conditional. And so I'm curious, if you want to share more about, you know, the the Palestine Liberation Movement, and you spoke a little bit to like the increased solidarity you're seeing, especially over the last year.

**Kal Jazeera** 13:51

Yeah, I will say it is such a confusing time. It is a painful time. It is an overwhelming time, because there's days I wake up and I look at the scroll and I've just like, never felt so hated, so hurt. And then you'll scroll to the next thing, and you'll see, like, how many people are attending these protests and these rallies, like, all at the same time? And like, we've also never seen that much solidarity, like when I was a kid in the 90s. No, I would tell people, I'm from Palestine, and they would say, Pakistan, or from Pakistan, what's that? Or where is that, you know, Palestine was like, you know, I have a clear memory of pointing to Palestine on a map, to my social studies teacher, and her saying, that's Israel. And just like not being seen, almost just like the like gaslighting that colonization does, where you're like, doubting yourself. And as a kid, I just didn't have, you know, enough around me affirming that like, No, this is who we are. This is this identity. So it's difficult. I just try to remember that, like, the people are not the governments. The people are standing with Palestine, and there's never been worldwide solidarity like there is now. I think the Palestine Liberation Movement is truly like liberating us all. I think it is really pointing the finger at fascism. It's pointing the finger at the Empire. And I think because that is so small, yet so big and powerfully pointed, and said the Emperor isn't wearing clothes, and that is strong. And I think there really is an opportunity here for us to really understand when we talk about, like the fact that all of the movement is tied together. I've told people for a long time, I'm just like, Are you not going to take it seriously until you see these IDF checkpoints that have that exist in Palestine here, when we have to go through our own borders to get from city to city and state to state? Because you have to remember that, like the relationships between the Israeli occupation force and the American government are one in the same they're two faces of the same coin, and that Palestine is a practice ground, and the same things that the same oppressive forces that are used on Palestinians are going to be used here on marginalized people. It's going to start with with migrants. It's going to start with undocumented people. It's going to start with the lower class, like people facing housing insecurity. So I think we have a lot to learn and that, like, I just wish people to understand that, like we don't have to

predict the future, and that it's right here. So what are we going to do about it? And I think that's what Palestinians are telling everyone.

**Dartricia Rollins** 14:03

And so...

**Kal Jazeera** 14:19

And let's breathe \*everyone takes a deep collective breath together\* I appreciate you two holding this with me and holding it together.

**Dartricia Rollins** 17:27

Thank you.

**Kal Jazeera** 17:29

Thank you.

**Ashby Combahee** 17:38

I... quick interjection. I'm wondering for you, have you spent much time in the South before?

**Kal Jazeera** 17:48

I have not spent much time in the South.

**Ashby Combahee** 17:50

Is this your first time in Atlanta?

**Kal Jazeera** 17:51

It is my first time in Atlanta.

**Ashby Combahee** 17:53

Okay...

**Kal Jazeera** 17:53

Yes, first time in Georgia

**Ashby Combahee** 17:56

Yeah. So, I mean, it just started. And so you're here for only, I'm sure, just a couple of hours at this point. It's, I think, as Southern organizers, we often tell the rest of the nation that we are in a similar position of being the testing ground. You know, we are at the belly of the beast of American imperialism within its own nation. And so yeah, I guess for only a few hours here, there's been any any impact so far, any observations of being here, knowing that Atlanta is a little bit different from the rest of the region. But yeah, I guess I'm curious what it's like for you to be in this space now? I don't know yet. Yeah, that's fair.

**Kal Jazeera** 18:47

It's it's early, and I think too that like being here for this conference is going to be just like a very specific lens and screenshot of like, everything, because everyone is here because they do this work already. Everyone is here because, like, this is what they do, and that's the intention. But I'm really interested to hear more from people here in Atlanta and here in the south of what organizing has been like here and what it feels like to feel like, Hey, we're in the testing grounds of this country and no one's listening to us. And hello, it's coming. Or are we stopping it?

**Ashby Combahee** 19:33

Yeah, are we stopping it? That's the question.

**Dartricia Rollins** 19:37

Yeah. No, my last question was gonna be, what are you hoping to get out of this conference?

**Kal Jazeera** 19:47

I hope to hear from people like you, hear other stories, and hear how I can be a connector, how I can build bridges. I'm really scared and sad that there is a lot of media propaganda right now trying to separate the Black solidarity movement and the Palestinian solidarity movement the Palestine Liberation Movement, and because of the election and election results, there is a culture and race war being imposed upon us, because once all of us are moving together we're unstoppable. And so there's this really scary narrative right now that's happening around Kamala's loss and its connection to like the genocide and all of that that is separating us. And so I know that a lot of that is just Tiktok, a lot of that is just Twitter and all of that. I'm here for the real life conversations. Let's really talk about it face to face and be like, Well, I'm with you, and you're with me, so I don't know what they're talking about. So do we go back to work now? Are we done? Can we let that go? Great, yeah, that's my hope, yeah. And I think we have lots of evidence that that is the case and that we're here with each other. So, you know, we say, as we have a conversation in this bus with a Palestine flag in the back with, you know, our beautiful queer selves and so, yeah, this is it. This is it. This is it. Yep,

**Dartricia Rollins** 21:55

We got us.

**Kal Jazeera** 21:56

We've got us. Everyone's welcome to join. Just come correct. All love. \*group recites, all love\*

**Ashby Combahee** 22:11

So good. Before we stop the recording. Is there anything else that you want to ensure that you say as part of this history?

**Kal Jazeera** 22:18

Uh, I think I just want to, like, hold a space of silence for everyone that we have lost this year and the last couple of years, to genocide, to pandemic, to I think there's a lot of space that needs to be held for the fact that we have lost a lot of lives in these last couple of years, and that is difficult to continue moving as if that isn't happening. So I'd like to hold a space for them and then take a deep breath together. Y'all down to do that. Okay? \*everyone holds a moment of silence\* And deep breath

\*everyone takes a deep breath together\* May we thrive and survive and live in the name of our ancestors.

**Ashby Combahee** 23:43

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**Dartricia Rollins** 23:43

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**Kal Jazeera** 23:43

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